

# Public Outreach and Communications Plan



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## **Nashua-Manchester 40818 (Capitol Corridor) Project Development Phase**

### **Public Outreach and Communications Plan**

#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Nashua-Manchester 40818 (Capitol Corridor) Project encompasses extending Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Commuter Rail train service 30 miles from Lowell, MA to Manchester, NH. The proposed service will utilize approximately 10 miles of MBTA railway from Lowell to Nashua and 20 miles of MBTA trackage rights on Pan Am Railways' (Pan Am) Northern Branch<sup>1</sup> northward onto Manchester. Pan Am freight is the only current user of these 30 railway miles. Plans for the new service would operate in cooperation with the MBTA using MBTA crews and rolling stock. The service design will seek to minimize infrastructure upgrades and operating expenses while providing service reliability.

Key actions include:

- Approximately 30 miles of upgraded track
- Signal system upgrades as well as federally mandated Positive Train Control (PTC)
- Upgrading 20 roadway grade crossings and 15 bridges
- Relocating utilities
- Design of four passenger stations and one layover facility

There are currently no rail passenger stations on the line north of Lowell, MA. The team will design up to four new passenger stations to meet ADA accessibility and MBTA design standards in conformance with FTA and track owner requirements. Typical station configurations will employ low-level platforms with "mini-highs" for level boarding where freight trains pass by and full-length high-level ADA compliant platforms at Depot Street in Manchester and Crown Street in Nashua. The team will evaluate and recommend the location and configuration of the proposed train layover facility. The station and layover facility work will leverage prior work to the maximum extent possible.

The Public Outreach and Communications Plan (POCP) describes how the Project Team will communicate with the public at various points of the project process via stakeholder meetings, newsletters, public meetings, e-bulletins, a project page on the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) website, and other forms of outreach, as appropriate.

The POCP outlines how the Project Team will inform and seek input from the municipalities and stakeholders. Several approaches will be used to keep appropriate parties apprised of progress throughout the project. The extensive outreach program conducted for the prior study will be used as

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<sup>1</sup> In 2020 CSX made an offer to purchase certain railroad assets of Pan Am Railways, and the transaction is currently pending before the U.S. Surface Transportation Board for approval.

a platform for this project. The current outreach will be built upon the framework developed during the 2014 project but will not be as extensive given the narrower scope of this project. Stakeholder opinions and comments will be documented and reviewed throughout the project.

## II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

NHDOT seeks to implement a comprehensive and inclusive POCP with the objective of developing the best possible solution for the Nashua-Manchester Project, which meets the project objectives and is embraced by stakeholders. The POCP has been developed to support engagement in accordance with the following guiding principles:

**Accessible** - The public will receive sufficient notice of the public meeting, which will be held at a convenient time, place, or on a virtual platform that is accessible to all. The public will be given time to review project-related materials in advance of the meeting. Up-to-date project information will be shared on the NHDOT project website.

**Transparent** - The project planning process will be clear and understandable. The Project Team will establish an open and honest dialogue with project stakeholders that shares pertinent information used to inform project decisions and direction. Technical information and regulatory procedures will be explained in simple language to help stakeholders understand the planning, regulatory, and design processes.

**Educational** - Stakeholders will have information presented to them which is appropriate to the project topics and issues. Project information, updates, and news will be consistently communicated through the project website, e-communications, newsletters, and local media outlets.

## III. COMPLIANCE

Public projects such as Nashua-Manchester are subject to regulatory requirements. Several federal and state statutes or guidance documents call for certain outreach and coordination measures to be taken to ensure that adequate public and regulatory agency input is incorporated into the project.

This project will comply with:

- Statewide and Metropolitan Planning. 23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 450 and 500 and 49 CFR Part 613, February 14, 2007;
- Environmental Impact and Related Procedures and Section 4(f). 23 CFR Parts 771 and 774, October 16, 2001; 40 CFR 1506.6 and Freedom of Information Act (5 U.S.C. 552);
- Protection of Historic Properties. 36 CFR Part 800;
- Air Quality Conformity. 40 CFR Part 51, November 24, 1993;
- Management and Monitoring Systems. 23 CFR 500, December 1, 1993;
- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;

- *Environmental Justice Executive Order 12898, US Department of Transportation Order 5610.2(a); and FHWA Work Zone Safety and Mobility Rule 23 CFR 630 subpart J.*

### *A Continuous Process*

The POCP is a living document. The plan will be regularly revisited, and refinements will be made throughout the project. This will allow for flexibility so that the Consultant Team can respond appropriately and efficiently to project needs as they evolve. This element is especially pertinent given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the unknowns surrounding how stakeholder outreach strategies will need to adapt throughout the project.

## **IV. ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS**

The POCP includes many methods to inform and involve stakeholders in a meaningful way. Project information will be available to stakeholders as well as Consultant Team members, who share information in a complete and understandable manner and record and respond to comments and concerns. Key initial elements in the POCP include:

### *Public Information Meeting*

The purpose of this meeting is to inform and obtain input from the public regarding the development of the project recommendations. It is anticipated that there will be one (1) Public Information Meeting held when the draft recommendations are developed but not yet approved or adopted. The Public Information Meeting will be open-house style with a brief presentation. The meeting is expected to last up to two hours. The Consultant Team will collaborate with the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) during the planning of the meeting to determine if it can be held in person or if it needs to be held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### *Stakeholder Meetings*

Stakeholder Meetings (10) are anticipated to collect information and present the project process to local communities, especially during the development of the financial plan and siting of the proposed stations and layover facility. Members of the Consultant Team will, in conjunction with NHDOT, meet with stakeholder groups at up to ten (10) meetings. The Consultant Team will consider hosting meetings virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Initial meetings with key stakeholder groups may include, but are not limited to:

- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
- Massachusetts Department of Transportation
- Pan Am Railway (Boston and Maine)
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Nashua Regional Planning Commission
- Southern New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission
- Central New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission
- City of Nashua – Nashua Rail Committee

- City of Manchester
- Town of Bedford
- Manchester-Boston Airport (MHT)
- Other potential financial partners
- Congressional Delegation
- NH Governor's Office
- NH State legislative leaders

### *Preparation and Documentation of Meetings*

The Consultant Team will be responsible for the preparation of meeting presentations. They will provide a written summary of Public Information and Stakeholder Meetings.

### *Fact Sheets*

The Consultant Team will develop two (2) fact sheets. The first will be developed within four months of project initiation to provide information about the beginning of the project, its goals and objectives, and anticipated timing of the Public Information Meeting. It will provide an email address for interested parties to sign up for email notifications. The second fact sheet will be created during the development of the Financial Plan for the proposed rail service.

### *Flyers*

The Consultant Team will produce up to three (3) flyers to inform the public about project developments and special topics.

### *Contact List*

The Consultant Team will maintain an email distribution list of interested parties throughout the project process. The list will serve to inform interested parties of project materials (e.g., fact sheets, reports on the webpage) and other updates (e.g., meeting notification). The mailing list shall include, but is not limited to:

- Legislators from U.S. Congress, NH Governor's Office, Executive Council, State Representative and Senate
- Individuals or organizations that have indicated an interest in this project in previous outreach efforts
- Stakeholders
- Media
- Local municipal officials

### *Media Relations*

The Consultant Team will provide supportive materials to NHDOT communications staff to assist with appropriately publicizing the public meeting in the Nashua-Manchester project area. The Team will provide a draft media advisory to NHDOT for the public meeting with pertinent information on the date, time, location, and purpose of the Public Information Meeting. Outreach to media outlets will occur prior to the public meeting. NHDOT will be responsible for all media contact.

### *Postcard*

The Consultant Team will develop and distribute one (1) postcard to advertise the Public Information Meeting. It will be distributed electronically to elected officials, municipalities, regional planning commissions, abutters to proposed rail stations, the proposed layover facility, and interested parties on the email contact list in advance of the meeting.

### *Website*

The Consultant Team will provide NHDOT relevant project information in the form of electronically formatted files for the agency to post on the NHDOT website. Information provided may include plans, reports, environmental documents, project documents and reports, notices of the upcoming public meeting, meeting presentations, fact sheets, and an NHDOT point-of-contact.

The Consultant Team will review the project page on the NHDOT website and provide new or updated content at least quarterly throughout the project.

### *Other Communication Activities*

Throughout the project, miscellaneous communication activities will occur with members of the public, especially during the periods leading up to meetings. A sampling of anticipated tasks is:

- Coordination with municipalities and regional planning commissions to email postcards and webpage links to their constituents in advance of the public meeting.
- Directly respond to comments or coordinate a response from another member of the study team.
- Develop and track all comments and responses in a database.
- Provide reports of comments for NHDOT.